



## **Frequently Asked Questions - Proposed Hunting and Fishing License Package**

### **1. When will license fees go up?**

License fees are set by the Michigan Legislature, not the Department of Natural Resources or the Natural Resources Commission (NRC). The NRC formed a work group to study license fees for the DNR. The work group, comprised of representatives from many of the major conservation groups in the state, recommended the proposed changes to the NRC. The NRC approved the recommendations and is working with the Legislature toward restructuring hunting, fishing and trapping fees. No action has yet been taken by the Legislature.

### **2. Why do we need to restructure license fees?**

The economy today in our state is vastly different than it was just 10 years ago. Ten years ago, the state was experiencing record-setting economic growth and state government had billion dollar budget surpluses. Today, Michigan's economic situation is completely different for many reasons, and state government is pressed to deliver required services with less revenue.

The DNR receives 76 percent of its funding from what are called state "restricted" funds. These are funds that can be used only for specific purposes. Hunting and fishing license fees are placed in a restricted fund called the Game and Fish Protection Fund, which provides one-third of the total state restricted funds used to operate the DNR. The Game and Fish Protection Fund provides funding for conservation officers, state game and wildlife area management, fish hatcheries and a host of other services that benefit hunters, anglers and trappers.

Over the past 20 years, the number of licensed anglers in our state has dropped 21.7 percent. The number of hunters has dropped 14.3 percent in the same period. There are many reasons people stop participating in hunting and fishing, and the DNR is launching new efforts to retain current hunters and anglers and recruit new ones.

As the amount of revenue the DNR has collected has steadily decreased, the cost of doing business has gone up. Inflation results in an annual 4% increase in costs for items such as gasoline, vehicles, utilities and trash disposal. License fees have not kept pace with inflation. Over the past 20 years, the cost of a deer hunting license has gone up only \$2.15; the cost of a bear license only 65 cents.

In addition, new public land uses, users and a growing number of neighbors have increased management responsibilities of the DNR. There also are new threats to natural resources such as invasive species, fish and wildlife diseases and habitat loss that the DNR must address.

### **3. Doesn't the DNR get money already from general tax dollars (General Fund)?**

Ten years ago, the DNR received 23.3 percent of its funding from the state's General Fund. Today, the DNR receives little General Fund money. In fact, General Fund dollars represent less than 9% of the DNR's annual budget. And half of that 9% goes to local governments, with only the remaining 4.5% to conservation.

**4. Didn't we just vote on something during the last election to provide the DNR with funding?**

No. Proposal 1, which was approved by voters in November, does not provide any new funding to the DNR. It only protects key DNR restricted funds, including the Game and Fish Protection Fund, from being used by the Legislature for other purposes.

**5. When were license fees last increased?**

The Legislature last approved license fee increases -- the fees hunters, anglers and trappers currently pay -- in 1996.

**6. If the Legislature doesn't approve higher fees, what will happen to the DNR?**

If license fees are not restructured and increased, the Game and Fish Protection Fund will have a deficit between \$9 and \$11 million in Fiscal Year 2007-08. By 2009-10, the deficit will balloon to \$45.9 million. There would be significant cuts to fish, wildlife and conservation law enforcement programs.

**7. I always read that the DNR is selling land. Isn't this helping your budget?**

No. When the DNR sells land that has been identified as surplus land, or land that has no natural resource value, the money made from the sale goes to the state's Land Fund and can be only used to purchase other land the DNR feels has greater natural resource value to the people of Michigan. The Land Fund cannot be used for any other purpose.

Another misconception is that the DNR has discretion on how to spend money in the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. The trust fund receives royalties on the sale and lease of state-owned mineral rights, **but the DNR does not control the use of trust fund dollars.** A voter-approved constitutional amendment earmarks this money for the purchase of recreational lands or the development of recreational facilities -- **it cannot be used for fish, wildlife and conservation law enforcement.**

**8. Why are the senior discounts being changed under the proposal?**

The 20% senior discounts for hunting and fishing license fees under the proposal better reflect discounts that seniors receive for other goods and services in the private sector.

The present senior discount (60% for most licenses) was provided in the past because the lost revenue from these discounts was offset by general fund money. Today, that money is no longer appropriated.

In 2005-2006, seniors purchased some 110,000 fishing licenses and 95,000 deer hunting licenses. The discount resulted in \$2.8 million less for fish, wildlife and conservation law enforcement activities.

**9. Can't the DNR just make cuts like the rest of state government and Michigan businesses?**

The DNR already has instituted \$8 million in spending cuts over the last three years as a part of the state's budget cuts during these tight economic times in Michigan. This has resulted in fewer conservation officers in the field, reduced fish stocking and a decrease in habitat restoration and protection as well as facility maintenance on many state game and wildlife areas among other impacts.

**10. How do the proposed fees compare with other states?**

The work group took a close look at what nearby states charge for comparable hunting and fishing licenses. In many cases, the current fees in Michigan are the lowest in the Upper Midwest. The new proposed fees bring many of our fees in line with what licenses cost in other states. In some cases, our fees are still the lowest of neighboring states.